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Testimony on HB 7027

AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNium ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

Appropriations Committee

Submitted by: Melissa Spear

Working Lands Alliance Steering Committee

February 17, 2017

Senators Osten and Formica, Representatives Walker and Ziobron, and Other
Distinguished Committee members:

My name is Melissa Spear and I am the vice-chair of the Steering Committee for the Working Lands Alliance (WLA), a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland. WLA includes such organizations as American Farmland Trust, the CT State Grange, CT Nursery and Landscape Association, End Hunger CT!, and the CT Farm Bureau, among many others. As an Alliance, we care deeply both about saving Connecticut's farmland and about ensuring a healthy agricultural sector and prosperous future for Connecticut's farmers.

WLA appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony on HB 7027. I would specifically like to address those areas of the budget that relate to farmland preservation efforts and the viability of Connecticut agriculture.

Like other agencies, the Department of Agriculture has undergone a series of cuts over the last several years. Despite these reductions, and with a limited staff, the department continues to provide critical services to Connecticut's agricultural community. Among its many responsibilities, the Department of Agriculture is tasked with preserving our prime farmland, providing assistance to farmers through its programs and services so that they may expand and diversify their operations, helping to implement new food safety regulations, assisting dairy farmers as they withstand drastic swings in milk prices, enforcing laws relating to CT farmers' markets and CT Grown products, and dealing with animal control and animal health issues.

The work of the Department of Agriculture is critical to ensuring agriculture remains a viable industry making significant contributions to our state's economy. For this reason, we are concerned that any additional cuts will have a detrimental effect on the agency's ability to carry out its important mission.

On behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, I thank the Committee for allowing us to share our concerns. We appreciate all that you have done, both in helping to ensure Connecticut agriculture remains viable and in protecting Connecticut's valuable farmland. Please know that we are available to act as a resource should you seek additional information as you continue with the awesome responsibility of crafting a budget that meets the critical needs of Connecticut's residents.